



COMMUNITY COMMENTS

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Human Uranium and Cultural Transformation

In central Minnesota, near the city of St. Cloud, is a large granite dome visible for miles around. It is called "The Peace Rock", for on its top Indian chiefs used to gather for counsel. This granite formation, of which this dome is the visible part, doubtless for much more than a hundred million years has been a vast, seemingly inert, unchanging mass.

We now know that throughout this mass of granite are numberless particles of uranium, each so fully isolated from the others by inert material that the isolated particles of uranium cannot reinforce each other and become active. Of the total weight of the granite, only about one part in a thousand is uranium. Even of that small part less than one per cent is the spontaneously active form of uranium (U235).*

Today's supplies of uranium for generating power are recovered from more limited but richer sources than granite. However, granite rock remains the vast source of power for the long-time future, and when men do decide to turn to that source of supply, the granite mass under and around "The Peace Rock" will supply enough uranium to operate the world's power plants for many years, enough to drive great fleets of ships many times around the earth. There

*Of uranium recovered in mining and processing, about 99.27% is U238, which must be changed into plutonium 239 to become spontaneously active. Only about .3% of the remainder is U235, which when concentrated into masses, is spontaneously active. One pound of this, on fission as at Hiroshima, releases energy (heat) similar to burning 3,000,000 pounds of coal.

are many such masses of granite in our country and in the world. Yet there it has been through long ages, lifeless and inert, each particle of uranium locked up and isolated from all others.

Scattered through the relatively inert mass of our population there are particles of humanity - men and women - who have such great potential for creative drive, imagination, and aspiration, that if they were not largely insulated, they would stimulate each other into vast achievement toward human well-being. On very rare occasions, here and there, occur individuals who, seemingly regardless of the limitations of their environments, break out into remarkable creativity. Among such were Leonardo da Vinci, Benjamin Franklin, Gregor Mendel, and Thomas Edison. However, even in these rare cases, there may have been powerful stimuli of which we are not aware. In general, single units of creativity do not stir themselves into sustained action. It is by interaction on each other that creative particles, either of uranium 235, or of humanity, actually break out into significant creative action.

Within the past 100 years probably greater progress has been made in the mastery of the physical world than in all previous recorded history. Especially is this the case in the fields of atomic structure and biochemistry. This accelerating progress very definitely has been largely the result of communication and interaction of a relatively few creative minds in these specialized fields, for these minds were selected from a large and relatively inert population mass and were concentrated in laboratories or other communities of creative inquiry.

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These epoch-making advances have been largely in highly specialized fields, commonly quite apart from the overall major drives of humanity. So strikingly is this true that many thoughtful men are deeply concerned lest these earth-shaking advances in very special fields, when they are put to use by the prevailing, relatively primitive motivations and other drives of men, may threaten the whole course of human life. It has become an overworked cliché among thinking people that technical advance has far outrun advances in human motivation.

In the public mind the most striking present instance of the failure of human motivation to keep pace with technology is the danger that the new knowledge concerning atomic structure may lead to atomic war. The new knowledge of the structure of matter chiefly results from the gathering together of a few outstandingly creative minds out of the general population and into intimate associations of communication and interaction, but in a narrow field. This impressive new knowledge in technology is in danger of being put to use in a world in which there has been no comparable discovering and assembling of creative minds that are concerned with human purpose.

Man is inherently a gregarious creature. He lives in societies, small and large. With occasional exceptions, he conforms to the ways of his group. Individuals who are potentially creative as to motivations, standards, and attitudes, often are embarrassed, almost ashamed and apologetic, for outlooks and ideals as to the general conduct of life which set them apart from their fellows. It is socially permissible for one to be objective and creative where the general conduct of life is not concerned. It is even allowable to be independently creative in some special field of human motivation, where the general purpose and conduct of life are but slightly concerned. However, there is a widespread and general tacit understanding in most human associations that, where the general, overall conduct of life is concerned, critical, objective judgment is bad form. This may be almost as true of a com-

pany of creative geniuses engaged in highly specialized research as of a group of unskilled laborers. Often an extremely strong craving to be accepted by a group of one's peers and associates is stronger than the impulse to act in accord with one's own selective creativity in the affairs of the common life. Creativity and discriminating definitions of standards may be boldly maintained in highly special fields where courage is lacking to maintain such attitudes as to general human motivation.

A primary concern of Community Service Incorporated is to fashion and to bring into effect, by unprecedented methods, the liberation of some of the world's vast sources of "human uranium" which now is held in relative inertness by isolation from the stimulation of its kind. A major means to this end will be orderly ways for bringing together persons who are creative-minded with reference to life in general, in such concentrations of interrelation and interaction that the combined liberated power will bring about significant social change. Community Service Incorporated will undertake to help creative-minded persons to find and to be associated in groups, fellowships of communities with the motives, competence, and drive necessary for human advance.

Arthur E. Morgan

Heritage and Progress

One of the essential conditions for human advance, for the survival and growth of healthy human societies, is the provision for progress and change. This is required not only for future generations within the present dominant pattern of life and civilization, but also for the birth and development of a variety of healthy new forms, some of which will be needed to supercede the dominant or old. Today many people are as confident of the dominant institutions of our time as was the ecclesiastical system in the Middle Ages, yet Alfred North Whitehead warned:

We cannot be more secure now than was the ecclesiastical system at the end of the twelfth century and a century afterward. And it failed.

To my mind our greatest danger is exactly the same as that of the older system. Unless we are careful we will conventionalize knowledge. Our literary system will suppress initiative. Our historical criticism will conventionalize our ideas of the springs of human conduct. Our scientific systems will suppress all understanding of the ways of the universe which fall outside their abstractions. Our modes of testing ability will exclude all youth whose ways of thought lie outside our conventions of learning. In such ways our universities and their systems of orthodoxies will stifle the progress of the human race unless by some fortunate stirring of humanity they in time are remodeled or swept away.

Throughout nature variety in genetic constitutions of plants and animals provides capacity to adapt to environmental changes that would be lethal to species whose genes were all the same. Those species survive which have among their offspring

sufficient variations to permit adaptation to each change upon which survival will depend. A freeze in midsummer, a new disease, a failure of the standard food supply, these must be surmounted. No one genetic constitution would suffice. The same is true with regard to social forms and cultural heritages. While the discipline of purpose and circumstance must control and limit social variation to avoid degeneration, variety in human societies is essential to man. We cannot know which culture will be required to produce essential cultural elements for our future just as the Roman government or the Jewish priesthood were unaware of how much would depend on an infant born to a small Galilean community of the troublesome Jewish nation.

One concern of Community Service Incorporated is to help and bring into a degree of mutual aid some of the important heritages of diverse culture that are now being exploited and crushed under the impact of the institutions of the dominant culture. There are many such groups whose progressive potentialities are being destroyed and which are becoming places of degeneracy because there has been inadequate recognition of their potential role in a wider ongoing community of man. The American Indian has had one of the most distinctive and important cultures in America. The standard treatment of Indian communities by the dominant institutions of our contemporary society is in its way as callous and destructive as was the killing of individuals, old and young, paid for by bounty in scalps by colonial and state governments long ago.

Paralleling the predicament of minority traditional cultures is the plight of people to whom the dominant culture and institutions of our society are ill-fitted or inadequate. When Peace Corpsmen return from their stint of service in less privileged nations, they commonly find little place for their skills and purposes within the dominant structure of our society. Their training has been to bring other societies up to the level of the problems and technology of American society. Where American society shall go from here and what these

Corpsmen shall do in American society has not been thought through. Unless those who have the capacity and opportunity for pioneering use it in opening ways forward, there is confusion, malaise or anomie among those who should be able to go in the forward thrust of human progress. It is not enough to help those who are "behind" us; we have to know where we are to go. And if we can go forward, we will be of greater benefit to other peoples, just as the Israelis are better able to help some of the African nations because pioneering is so new and current in Israel.

There is thus an associated need both on the part of progressive pioneers in new ways of living and of distinctive heritages, such as those of the American Indians, to have a recognized place and role in the world. Neither can exist in isolation as museum pieces. To live is to communicate, to respond, to accommodate, but is not to be assimilated out of existence or suppressed by dominant institutions that cut all societies to the procrustean bed of public education systems, commercial exploitation, and standardization of governmental procedures. For people from subcultures to be progressive and effective members of a larger society is not synonymous with giving up their part in small communities with diverse cultural traditions. Herman Melville, writing out of his concern for this problem, said: "The future, what is that to her who vaunts she's no inheritor?" Tradition and progress must go hand in hand and not be set at enmity. On this basis each minority and subculture can be a strength and resource for each other and the nation. With this perspective the problems of Judaism, of the American Indian, of the Negro in America, and of nationality groups everywhere - these may have a resolution that would otherwise be impossible.

The scientific fields of nuclear physics and astronomy grew out of sharing and fellowship in thought and endeavor among a small qualified number of people. In human life as a whole, progress in developing total patterns of life and action needs similar fellowships. The aim must be progressive

discovery, thought, and endeavor in the wholeness of life for common ultimate purposes.

Fellowship, as contrasted with either isolation or mass action, makes possible enrichment, cross-fertilization, and stimulation of thought. Just as fellowships in fields of science and art cross all boundaries of ideology, nationality, race, or religion in their endeavor to advance understanding and accomplishment, so should fellowship between communities of people who are pioneering new ways of life harmonize with communities maintaining the progressive development of older ones.

With such a basis of common purpose, individuals holding the deepest culture of any of a variety of peoples and groups can meet in unity. American Indians, Japanese, Jews, Europeans, Orientals, and progressive communities of our dominant culture - all these can strengthen each other in their own best distinctive ways and traditions, and also they can enrich each other and help develop overall unity. The wealth of variety and difference is then treasured as a mutual asset and not regarded as a threat to the ways and culture of any group.

It is on the basis of this belief that Community Service Incorporated has concerned itself with such diverse pioneering endeavors as Yellow Springs in Ohio, tribal society in Ghana, Mitraniketan in India, Celo Community in North Carolina, the progressive-traditional Seneca Nation in New York State, and other purposive communities in America. Today it is girding itself in an endeavor to work in association with the Hopi people of Arizona, recognizing, as the Hopis have long recognized, that their great heritage must grow in such association with other cultures on the basis of mutual respect and enrichment motivated by ultimate common purposes of human well-being.

Griscom Morgan

Note to Subscribers: The last issue of COMMUNITY COMMENTS, Vol. XVII, No. 1-3, appeared in September 1961 and is complete as it stands. All subscriptions active at that time will be extended to comply with the original agreement.